

COVID-19: Masking in Schools

| Background

Central District Health (CDH) recognizes the value of in-person learning and the challenge of balancing the risks of COVID-19 and educational, social, and emotional supports. While COVID-19 is circulating in the United States, measures need to be taken in order to ensure that schools operate in a way that minimizes risk to students, staff, and the community.

In keeping with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations, CDH recommends that teachers, staff, students and visitors who are above the age of two (2) and not fully vaccinated practice proper masking in school buildings*. Anyone who is fully vaccinated does not need to wear a mask, but may choose to. Someone who is fully vaccinated, but is immunocompromised may wish to continue wearing masks. When you wear a mask, you protect others as well as yourself.

**Masks fit correctly and completely cover the nose and mouth without gapping. The CDC offers the following guidance on [How to Wear Masks](#).*

| Masking is an Effective Way to Reduce Transmission

The CDC reports that COVID-19 spreads primarily from person to person through respiratory droplets that travel into the air when individuals cough, sneeze, talk, or shout. Once these droplets are expelled into the air, they can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or they may breathe these droplets in.

Studies show that masks reduce the spray of droplets when worn over the nose and mouth. Unvaccinated students and staff should wear a mask, even if they do not feel sick. Several studies have found that people with COVID-19 who never develop symptoms and those who are not yet showing symptoms can still spread the virus to others.

In indoor congregate settings of individuals who do not reside together, like schools, it is particularly important that unvaccinated individuals practice universal masking to protect themselves and those around them.

- Sourced from CDC - [Guidance for Wearing Masks](#)

| Masking and Quarantine Procedures

CDC has updated their close contact definition to include an exception for students in K-12 classroom settings. CDC's exception states that unvaccinated students in the K-12 indoor classroom setting* who were within three to six (3-6) feet of an infected student *do not need to quarantine** when:*

- Both students were engaged in consistent and correct use of well-fitting masks;
and
- Other K-12 school prevention strategies were in place in the K-12 school setting.

The K-12 indoor classroom setting is the only place this exception applies. This exception **CANNOT be applied for exposure in other spaces in the school, extracurricular activities, or the community.*

***These students do not need to quarantine from school or extracurricular activities, but should quarantine from the community.*

This exception cannot be used if unvaccinated students were not correctly wearing masks during the exposure.

This exception does not apply to teachers, staff, or other adults in the indoor classroom setting. Any teacher, staff, or other adult who is unvaccinated should maintain six (6) feet of distance or more between themselves and others not from their household. If a teacher, staff, or other adult is unvaccinated and is within six (6) feet of an individual diagnosed with COVID-19 they would need to quarantine according to their school's policy.

| Vaccines

In the event of an exposure, schools should have a protocol in place to verify vaccination status. Those who are fully vaccinated do not need to quarantine, but should monitor for symptoms. Should symptoms arise in a fully vaccinated individual they should talk with their healthcare provider.

| Masking and Physical Distancing Procedures

CDC recommends schools maintain at least three (3) feet of physical distance between students within classrooms combined with indoor mask wearing by students who are not fully vaccinated. These two strategies will help reduce risk of virus transmission within the classroom. If possible, six (6) feet of distance is still recommended between individuals who are not fully vaccinated.

CDC recommends in-person learning for the 2021-2022 school year and acknowledges that three (3) feet of distance will not always be maintained. When unable to maintain the three (3) feet of distance, it is recommended that multiple other mitigation strategies are utilized to reduce risk of transmission. These other mitigation strategies include indoor masking of unvaccinated individuals, screening tests, cohorting, improved ventilation, handwashing, proper respiratory etiquette, sick individuals staying home, and regular cleaning. It is best to use multiple mitigation strategies at once for the most protection.

Resources for Use + More Information:

CDC - How to Wear a Cloth Face Covering: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/how-to-wear-cloth-facecoverings.html>

CDC - When to Quarantine: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/quarantine.htm>